DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 530 CS 005 086

AUTHOR Bingham, Jane M.
TITLE Pictorial Treatment of Blacks and Teaching Picture Reading Skills in Order to Enrich Children's Vocabularies.
PUB DATE Oct 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association Great Lakes Regional Reading Conference (4th, Detroit, MI, October 18-20, 1979) ; Best copy available

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Blacks; *Black Stereotypes; *Childrens Literature; Cognitive Development; *Cultural Awareness; Elementary Education; *Illustrations; Literary Influences; *Pictorial Stimuli; *Race Relations; Teaching Techniques; Vocabulary Development

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relation of the treatment of black characters in illustrations in children's reading materials to children's picture reading skills and vocabularies. Pointing out that illustrations introduce children to a wide range of experiences, it argues that using illustrations of black characters strengthens children's critical reading/thinking skills while strengthening their knowledge about physical characteristics, life styles, and environments that are pictured for black characters. The paper notes that black children can also learn about white children and about other subjects in the same way. It provides several suggestions for using illustrated books to help increase children's understandings and vocabularies and offers a list of illustrated picture books depicting black characters that can be used as discussion starters. The paper concludes with a list of criteria for evaluating picture books, including illustrations, text, format, and comparisons. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Pictorial Treatment of Blacks
and
Teaching Picture Reading Skills in Order to Enrich Children's Vocabularies

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Jane M. Bingham
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by Jane M. Bingham
Associate Professor of Education
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan 48063

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ED177530

CS005086

I have come here today to talk about two topics which at first may appear to you to be unrelated and maybe even unimportant -- the treatment of Black characters in illustrations and children's picture reading skills and vocabularies . The two topics are related because picture reading skills and vocabulary can be developed through the study of the treatment of Blacks in illustrations and because such study can help sensitize children to the great variety of Black life styles and physical characteristics which exist in our country today.

Initially too, the pictorial treatment of Blacks in children's reading materials may seem to be unimportant and unrelated to the school curriculum. I'm sure many people feel that the Civil Rights Acts of the sixties took care of the discrimination problems Blacks traditionally encountered in the United States. The Acts helped, but I work in Rochester, Michigan a suburb of Detroit, and I am very much aware of the uneasiness whites experience each time,for example, court ordered busing for the suburbs is mentioned or each time a new Black family moves into the neighborhood (which isn't very often, by the way).

The uneasiness that Blacks and Whites often experience with one another has often erupted into hate and violence. The schools have traditionally been called upon to help ease tensions through the creation of special programs and the use of special curriculum materials. Even television companies have been urged to create special TV programs and to include more Blacks in commercials. Certainly, the steps already taken by the schools and the television industry have been, on the whole, helpful. But as with most things,

it is the day to day personal relationships and the quality of interaction between an individual and his environment that influence his human relationships the most. Memorizing when Martin Luther King was born for Black History Week or watching Arnold on "Different Strokes for Different Folks" do not have to have any significant influence on how a person perceives Blacks, in general. Memorizing is not a particularly emotional act and Arnold is so outrageous that he doesn't have to be taken very seriously. And most people, Black and White, breathe a sigh of relief, because they are fairly sure they won't have to contend with an Arnold in real life. They wouldn't mind meeting him once, but they probably wouldn't want to live with him.

What has all this got to do with illustrations and picture reading skills? Just this. We all know that illustrations provide an excellent means for introducing children to a wide range of experiences. Illustrations in books available for children today depict Blacks with a variety of physical characteristics and life styles, and the pictures present a much wider range of experience than does TV. In addition, the pictures are not fleeting presentations. Pictures are tangible. They can be discussed in great detail and they can be compared more easily and in a more concrete way than TV programs. Also, book illustrations which feature Blacks are more plentiful than images of Blacks presented on TV.

Most often, when people are clear-headed about the facts of a situation and are not fearful, it is because they have had a wide range of positive experiences (much of it vicarious) to draw upon. In the case of White people's perceptions of Black people, it is important that Whites see Blacks in a variety of home environments and work environments and with a variety of physical characteristics. People often fear that which they do not fully know and, of course, prejudice is based on fear.

If Whites don't live near Blacks or work with Blacks, specific knowledge is hard to come by - except through media such as TV, movies and books. I've already pointed out the limitations of TV, and movies are even more limited, especially with the added expense of movies. Therefore, it is primarily through books that a variety of images of Blacks may be carefully examined.

And what should this examination consist of? It has to do, in part, with a person's ability to read pictures. We all know that American society is becoming more and more dependent on visual stimuli. It this is so, it is critical, it seems to me that we help children, both Black and White children, learn how to evaluate visual stimuli, including book illustrations.

Helping children learn how to ask the right sorts of questions about pictures and helping them discover how to answer the questions they pose is basic to the process of critical inquiry. Specifically, in the case of looking at illustrations which feature Black characters the children will, I believe, not only strengthen their critical reading/thinking skills (because, of course, the process of asking good questions is the same for the text as it is for the illustrations) but the children will also strengthen their knowledge about and their ability to think critically about the variety of physical characteristics, life styles and environments that are pictured for Black characters.

I think, of course, that Black children need to critically examine the treatment of Blacks too. In addition, the treatment of Whites would provide another problem for study. Indeed, there are many subjects which can be critically studied through illustrations -- the treatment of males, females, animals, Native Americans, cities, school, babies, the aged, and so on.

It is my belief that children who are able to ask good questions and to make critical assessments without fear (fear of being wrong or finding out that some cherished belief or value may be in jeopardy) will be better able to embrace the highly touted and basic American principles of the brotherhood of man and equality and justice for all.

So much for my justification for using the image of Blacks in illustrations as my subject for study. When we read (pictures or text) there has to be some content in order for the reading to be meaningful and, of course, reading without meaning is a lame exercise.

In order to get meaning from pictures children (and most adults too) begin by labeling items (dog, tree, etc.); they often attribute a three dimensional quality to items on a page and try, for example, to pick up the pictured cookie or try to see the back of a person by turning the page. As children grow in experience with pictures they describe the pictured items (not just label them) and they react to them emotionally - a nice cat and bad dog and so on, sometimes the bad dog even gets spanked.

Most children have time to sit and look at pictures with thoroughness and intensity. Helping children learn to express verbally that which they have seen and felt is a basic goal of our language arts programs (or should be, at least). How often have we found ourselves in a situation where our store of words failed us. We just didn't have the right word to express what we wanted to say. Often this happens because our vocabularies are not very rich, we don't continue to increase our store of new words, words which would make our language more precise and more interesting.

Today we will have the opportunity to become familiar with the great diversity of Black characters presented in children's book illustrations and as we discover activities to use with children to increase their vocabularies and picture reading skills, we will also be able to stretch our own vocabularies and picture reading skills by looking at and talking about some slides I'll be showing you.

Discussion Starters:

Selected Picture Books Which Present Black Characters in Varied Ways

Alexander, Martha. The Story Grandmother Told. Dial, 1969.

Bannerman, Helen. Little Black Sambo. Lippincott, 1899.

Bible, Charles. Jennifer's New Chair. Holt, 1978.

Blue, Rose. A Quiet Place. Watts, 1969.

Bontemps, Arna. Mr. Kelso's Lion. Lippincott, 1970.

Bryant, Sara Cone. Epaminondas and His Auntie. Houghton, 1938.

Clifton, Lucille. Amifka. Dutton, 1977.

Clifton, Lucille. All Us Come Across the Water. Holt, 1973.

Clifton, Lucille. The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring. Dutton, 1973.

Clifton, Lucille. Don't You Remember? Dutton, 1973.

Clifton, Lucille. Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long. Holt, 1978.

Clifton, Lucille. Everett Anderson's Year. Holt, 1974.

Clifton, Lucille. Good, Says Jerome. Dutton, 1973.

Clifton, Lucille. She Come Bringin' Me That Little Baby Girl. Lippincott, 1974.

Feelings, Muriel. Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book. Dial, 1974.

Feelings, Muriel. Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book. Dial, 1971.

Gray, Genevieve. Send Wendell. McGraw, 1974.

Greenberg, Polly. Oh Lord, I Wish I Was A Buzzard. Macmillan, 1968.

Heide, Florence Parry. Sound of Sunshine, Sound of Rain. Parents', 1970.

Isadora, Rachel. Ben's Trumpet. Greenwillow, 1979.

Jordan, June. New Life: New Room. Crowell, 1975.

Keats, Ezra Jack. Goggles. Macmillan, 1969.

Keats, Ezra Jack. A Letter To Amy. Harper, 1968.

Keats, Ezra Jack. Peter's Chair. Harper, 1967.

Jane M. Bingham
Oakland University
Rochester, MI 48063

Keats, Ezra Jack. The Snowy Day. Viking, 1962.

Keats, Ezra Jack. The Trip. Greenwillow, 1978.

Keats, Ezra Jack. Whistle for Willie. Viking, 1964.

Lawrence, Jacob. Harriet and the Promised Land. Simon, 1968.

Lexau, Joan. Benjie. Dial, 1968.

Lexau, Joan. Benjie On His Own. Dial, 1970.

Lexau, Joan. Me Day. Dial, 1971.

Mendoza, George. And I Must Hurry for the Sea Is Coming In. Prentice, 1969.

Myers, Walter Dean. Where Does the Day Go? Parents', 1969.

Nolan, Madeena. My Daddy Don't Go To Work. Carolrhoda, 1978.

Scott, Ann. Sam. McGraw, 1967.

Steptoe, John. Birthday. Holt, 1972.

Steptoe, John. My Special Best Words. Holt, 1975.

Steptoe, John. Stevie. Harper, 1969.

Steptoe, John. Train Ride. Harper, 1971.

Steptoe, John. Uptown. Harper, 1970.

Thomas, Ianthe. Hi, Mrs. Mallory! Harper, 1979.

Thomas, Ianthe. Lordy, Aunt Hattie. Harper, 1973.

Thomas, Ianthe. Walk Home Tired Billy Jenkins. Harper, 1974.

Some Suggestions for Using Illustrated Books To Help Increase Children's Understandings and Vocabularies

by Dr. Jane M. Bingham
Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan 48063

1. Present an illustration. Ask the children to list everything they can tell "for sure" from the picture. Then ask the children to list some things which are not too clear in the picture (things which they do not know "for sure"). Then ask the children to make some inferences about the things pictured, (things which might be possible based on some evidence presented in the picture.)

2. Present an illustration and encourage the children to ask as many questions as possible about the illustration. The answers may or may not be obvious in the illustration. Help the children categorize their questions into factual and inferential types of questions.

3. Ask the children some questions about an illustration which would take some research to answer. Or encourage the children to think of questions about a picture that would be difficult for their classmates to answer without having done some research.

4. Ask the children to explain why an artist has presented certain features in his/her illustration. For example, ask about why certain colors were chosen or why particular people or objects are pictured.

5. Ask the children to describe how a character is feeling based solely on the way in which he/she is pictured. Based on the illustration ask the children to make up and to act out a scene in which the pictured character takes part.

6. Ask the children to select two or three items from a particular illustration and describe how the item feels, tastes, looks, sounds, and smells. This can be done orally or in written form.

7. Ask the children to compare the information given in the illustration to the information presented in the text. In what ways does the illustration extend the text by presenting things that are not stated in the text? In what ways does the illustration add things that are in conflict with what is stated in the text?

8. Find several books illustrated by the same artist. Develop a list of words that can be used to describe the artist's work. The words can be divided into such categories as color, style, and medium.

9. Encourage the children to experiment with such illustrative media as pen and ink, watercolor and collage after looking at books which contain illustrations done in these media. Ask the children to describe the problems involved in using the different media.

10. Ask the children to select one illustrated book and tell why they find the illustrations appealing. Encourage them to use as many specific words as possible to describe why they like the illustrations. Encourage them to avoid such general words as cute and nice.

I. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

A. Illustrations

1. Which medium or combinations of media have been used? (watercolor, ink, chalk, crayon, woodcut or linoleum cut, collage, tempera, etc.)
2. How many colors have been used and are they appropriate to the subject and mood of the story? Are they bright, soft, varied, etc.?
3. How would you describe the artist's style of illustrating? (delicate, vigorous, realistic, stylized, decorative, bold, detailed, etc.)
4. Has the illustrator used a different style, technique, and/or medium in this book as compared to others he or she has done?
5. How has the artist created movement, rhythm, and balance in the illustrations? How effectively is space used?
6. Are the illustrations authentic and consistent with the text? Is the text accurately conveyed in the illustrations?

B. Text

1. Summarize the plot or idea in one or two sentences. Is the book realistic, fanciful, traditional, biographical or historical, informational?
2. Where and when does the story take place?

3. What theme is presented? (friendship, loneliness, etc.)

4. Is the text well written? Does it include sentence variety, enriching vocabulary, and appropriate diction, etc.? If characters are used, how are they handled? (stereotypes, rounded characters, realistic development, etc.)

5. Which age group would find the book most appropriate in terms of the concepts that are presented? (ages 2-3; 4-5; 6-7; 8-9; 10-11; 12-13; 14-15)

C. Format

1. What is the size of the book and is it significant to the idea or mood? Does the cover design convey the spirit of the book?

2. How does the end papers reflect the mood of the book?

3. Does the title page add significantly to the book's design?

4. Is the book's binding durable and is the paper quality good?

5. Was the type design well chosen for the theme and the intended reader of the book?

D. Comparisons

1. In what ways is the book similar to or different from other works of the illustrator or writer?

2. In what ways is the book similar to or different from other books with the same subject or theme?

3. What comments have professional reviewers made about the book?

4. What comments have the illustrator and/or writer made about the book?